

ISSUE: Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) Program Redirection.

Invitation to NAVSAC: Committee meeting will be an outreach session to provide advice to the Coast Guard as it begins the quest to comply with the Congressional mandate to develop a new Federal approach to providing vessel traffic services. The Committee is requested to consider the following questions:

1. Is partnering with Federal, state and local governments, public authorities, and the private sector desirable for planning and designing VTS?
2. Are shared acquisition and financing of VTS by the partnership desirable?
3. Are shared operations and maintenance of VTS by the partnership desirable?
4. In addition to fulfilling the goals of waterway safety and marine environment protection, can technology for surveillance, information dissemination, and waterway traffic management advance other economic and commercial goals?
5. Are most commercial maritime interests willing to invest the time and energy to forge an effective consortium whose sole objective is to define the requirements, design the system, plan the financing and acquisition, and support the long term operations and maintenance of a VTS?
6. What organizational or partnering structure would be most effective?
7. What resources would a local port area consortium require from the Coast Guard to support a partnership planning effort?
8. Are there other issues that could be addressed by the partnership?

BACKGROUND:

The Coast Guard currently operates vessel traffic services (VTS) in eight ports: New York, NY; San Francisco, CA; Houston-Galveston, TX; Puget Sound, WA; Valdez, AK (has automated dependence surveillance system capability); Morgan City, LA;

Louisville, KY; and Sault Sainte Marie, MI. The Coast Guard jointly operates a Vessel Traffic Information System (VTIS) with the Marine Exchange in Los Angeles/Long Beach, CA. VTS-like systems are privately operated at various ports in the U.S.

A VTS system typically consists of remote surveillance sensors, such as radar or closed-circuit television, and a central data-gathering location - a vessel traffic center. VTS personnel receive information on marine traffic conditions, assess this information, and pass on relevant portions to mariners and other interested parties. The purpose of a VTS, as defined by IMO, is to improve the safe and efficient movement of commerce and to protect the environment.

In response to Congressional direction, the Coast Guard conducted a study to assess the need for VTS systems in ports throughout the country. Based on the study, the Coast Guard was considering constructing new or improved VTS system in as many as 17 ports. The proposed expansion, called "VTS 2000", was estimated to cost \$150 million in Federal funds to build and about \$42 million in Federal funds to operate each year if installed at all 17 ports. The plan was to pay these costs from the Coast Guard's budget and not pass them on to local ports or to users.

The FY97 Appropriations required the Coast Guard to end the VTS 2000 program and identify minimum user requirements for new VTS systems in consultation with local officials, waterway users, and port authorities. Reviewing user fee options and private/public partnerships are required elements of a study which is to be completed at the end of FY97. At that time, the Coast Guard will propose a production program supported by local communities which will provide near-term safety benefits.

REFERENCES:

1. National Research Council Interim Report "Vessel Navigation and Traffic Services for Safe and Efficient Ports and Waterways"
2. GAO Report "Marine Safety - Coast Guard Should Address Alternatives as it Proceeds with VTS 2000".
3. Intertanko's "U.S. Port and Terminal Safety Study"
4. FY97 Appropriation Bill language.